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## CUBA'S POULTRY AND EGG INDUSTRY

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### Summary

The Cuban egg situation in 1946 was featured by the heaviest importations in 20 years. The Government waived the duty of 12 cents a dozen to permit imports up to 3 million dozen, and about 2 million dozen actually were received in 1946, mostly in the last quarter.

Prior to 1930, Cuba imported considerable quantities of eggs and poultry, almost entirely from the United States. Since 1930, the higher import duties have sharply reduced imports and stimulated domestic production. Practically no eggs were imported from 1931 until 1945, when the Government encouraged imports by emergency waiver of the import duty.

Cuba's poultry industry is on an extensive basis. Farm flocks are small, of mixed breeds, and receive practically no care or special feed. With sharply higher prices during the past two or three years, however, a few relatively large and up-to-date poultry farms have been started near Habana.

During most of the past 20 years, Cuba has had enough poultry and eggs to meet its own requirements. Although most farmers pay very little attention to their flocks, poultry is an important source of food. Rice cooked with chicken (arroz con pollo) is Cuba's national dish. The sale of a few chickens or eggs also provides the farmer with a little ready cash, and fighting cocks provide the principal amusement in rural areas.

From 1920 to 1925, Cuba imported about 12 million dozen eggs a year from the United States, with an average value of about 3.7 million dollars a year. At that time Cuba was by far our most important export market, taking from 40 to 50 percent of all the eggs exported from the United States. In 1927 and 1930, however, the Cuban Government sharply increased its import duties on eggs as well as many other products in order to encourage domestic production. From 1933 through 1945, imports never reached 600 dozen in any year.

Prepared in the Livestock and Wool Division and based on information from Paul G. Minneman, Agricultural Attache, American Embassy, Habana, Cuba.



In 1945, however, Cuban production dropped as a result of the severe drought, while the demand increased due to the scarcity of meat and other food and increased consumer purchasing power. The Cuban Government waived import duties on specified quantities of eggs, and imports rose to 166,600 dozens, valued at about \$56,900. Extension of the waiver in 1946 made possible heavy importation, estimated at about 2 million dozen. Importers believe as many as 6 million dozen could be absorbed under present conditions and are urging continuance of the customs benefits in 1947.

### Production

No accurate enumeration of poultry numbers is available. The latest census (1931) listed only the number of hens of which there were 3.68 million. In mid-1946, a rough estimate of the total number of all kinds of poultry was placed at 12 million, of which 10.5 million were chickens and the remainder turkeys, ducks, and guineas. Heavy slaughter recently has reduced present chicken numbers to about 9 million, of which 4 million are hens and the remainder other chickens, including a substantial number of fighting cocks.

The 1931 Census listed 87,396 farms in Cuba, which would indicate an average of about 42 hens per farm, varying from 23 in Oriente Province to 90 in Habana (Table 1). Including young chickens, the total number per farm probably is about 100. It is estimated that about one-fifth of the farms have a relatively large number of chickens, about 300 each; most farms have about 100 to 120 each; but many have only 25 to 35 chickens.

Table 1.--Number of farms, number of hens and  
hens raised, by provinces, 1931

Province	Hens					
	Farms					
	Total	Total	Average	Percentage	Raised	
	number	number	per	distribution	during	
	Number	1,000	Number	Percent	1,000	
Finar del Rio	11,457	518	45	14.1	438	
Habana	11,393	1,022	90	27.8	499	
Matanzas	7,429	268	36	7.3	213	
Las Villas	23,280	1,004	43	27.3	1,615	
Camaguey	7,768	260	33	7.0	216	
Oriente	26,069	608	23	16.5	457	
Total	87,396	3,680	42	100.0	3,436	

Censo de Población, Estadística Industrial y Agrícola de Cuba, 1931

Egg production in 1930, according to the Census (Table 2), amounted to 22.65 million dozens, of which only about 8.2 million dozens, or 36 percent, were sold from the farm, and 14.45 million dozens, or 74 percent, were consumed on the farm. In Habana Province, with larger flocks and close to the market, the proportion is reversed; 65 percent was sold and 35 percent consumed on the farm. Production of eggs in 1946 is estimated at 25 million dozen, slightly less than the 27 million produced in 1945. Normal production is believed to be somewhat above these levels.

Table 2.--Eggs produced and sold by farmers,  
by provinces in 1930

Province	Number		Eggs produced		Eggs sold	
	of hens	:	Total	Average	Total	Percent of
			number	per hen	number	production
			1,000	Number	1,000	Percent
	1,000	:	dozs.	Number	dozs.	Percent
Pinar del Rio	518	:	2,234	52	703	32
Habana	1,022	:	5,292	62	3,496	65
Matanzas	268	:	1,667	75	480	29
Las Villas	1,004	:	5,573	67	1,823	33
Camaguey	260	:	1,929	89	502	26
Oriente	608	:	5,955	117	1,191	20
Total	3,680	:	22,650	74	8,195	36

Censo de Población, Estadística Industrial y Agrícola de Cuba, 1931.

The average production per hen, according to the Census, was 74 eggs a year, but varied widely from 52 in Pinar del Rio to 117 in Oriente. Production is highly seasonal, being heaviest from January to May and lowest in August and September. The production per hen probably has not increased much above the 74 eggs per hen reported in 1931. This compares with a national average of 147 in the United States in 1944. The up-to-date poultrymen near Habana, however, report averages of about 145 to 180 eggs per hen. Cuban eggs as a rule are very small, from 18 to 20 ounces, and average only about 19 ounces per dozen, whereas the eggs from the few good flocks near Habana vary from 20 to 30 ounces and average about 23.5 ounces per dozen.

#### Poultry Husbandry

Production practices vary widely between the typical Cuban farm methods and those used by the few large, up-to-date producers near Habana. The farmers, who have over 90 percent of the poultry, pay little or no attention to their flocks. Very few farms have any poultry houses, but leave their chickens roost in the trees at night and have to look for the eggs in some likely spot near the farm buildings. These chickens forage for their feed and usually receive only table scraps and possibly a little corn. These farmers do not have incubators nor do they purchase chicks, but rely solely on some hens to hatch broods entirely without attention from the farmer.



The typical farm flocks are a mixture of criollo with Spanish Catalana and such American breeds as Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire Red, Leghorn and Plymouth Rock. A mixture with fighting cock blood is also common. The net effect is obviously a hardy mixture adapted to foraging, but with very low egg production. Most chickens are lighter weight than in the United States and produce much smaller size eggs.

Near Habana, there are some dozen modern and relatively large poultry farms, most of which were started during the war years when prices for both eggs and meat rose rapidly above the pre-war level and made commercial production feasible, even with the prevailing high prices for feedstuffs. It is estimated that these large and up-to-date poultry farms altogether represent not more than 20,000 or 30,000 hens. A few specialize in the production of 2-pound broilers, some specialize in selling breeding stock, eggs and day-old chicks, and others specialize in production of strictly fresh, fancy eggs for the Habana market.

These dozen farmers have incubators varying in capacity from 300 to 6,000 eggs each, and raise their chickens under the most up-to-date and scientific methods, as indicated by the fact that they have a very low mortality rate of not over 10 percent up to 10 weeks of age. Most of these producers specialize in White Leghorns, Rhode Island Reds and New Hampshire Reds. The largest producer of broilers uses a cross of purebred Leghorn hens with New Hampshire Red roosters.

Feed costs are high. During the past five years, shelled corn has been available at from 2.5 to 5.0 cents per pound. No other grain is grown in Cuba, except a little grain sorghum, which is used by some small farmers and is available on the market for a few months at 3 cents. When available, the larger poultrymen near Habana use some imported wheat, but that has also been scarce and high priced, at about 5.6 cents per pound. Domestic tankage, however, is available at reasonable prices of about 3.0 cents. Imported growing mash, starter, and scratch feed cost from 5.5 to 7.5 cents per pound in Habana, and laying mash about 4.8 cents.

#### Consumption

The best available estimates indicate that the consumption of eggs in Cuba increased from about 282 million in 1930 to 336 million in 1946. This would be equivalent to only about 48 eggs per capita in 1946 as compared with 392 per capita in the United States in 1945. Consumption in Cuba is much smaller in summer than in winter not only because of reduced production, but also because of a popular belief that it is not conducive to good health to eat many eggs during the hot weather.

Consumption of poultry may be estimated at about 18 million fowl a year, or nearly 4 per capita. This is considerably lower than in the United States, where in 1945 per capita consumption was almost 30 pounds.

# Prices

Prior to the war, eggs sold in Habana during most of the year at 15 to 25 cents a dozen. In late 1942, prices began to rise and, following the hurricane in late 1944, reached 80 cents to \$1.00 a dozen. Prices in June 1946 averaged 73.4 cents. Prices are usually lowest from February to October and highest from November to January. At first glance, this appears to be inconsistent with seasonal production, but is influenced largely by the reduced consumer demand during the hot summer months.

In January 1947, imported eggs of good quality were selling at 80 cents a dozen, and Cuban eggs, when available, at 70 to 90 cents. Heavy imports in December 1946 are credited with restraining an accelerated price rise.

Live poultry prices before the war averaged 15 to 20 cents a pound in Habana. Price data of the Ministry of Agriculture show the average retail prices of eggs and poultry in Habana in recent years.

Table 3.--Yearly average retail prices of  
eggs and live poultry in Habana

Year	:	Eggs	:	Live poultry
	:	Cents per dozen	:	Cents per pound
1939	:	20.5	:	19.1
1940	:	20.5	:	20.6
1941	:	26.1	:	20.7
1942	:	36.5	:	28.6
1943	:	42.6	:	35.8
1944	:	58.1	:	49.1
1945	:	62.2	:	64.1
1946 (6 mos.)	:	67.4	:	68.4

## Imports and Exports

Imports. About 25 years ago, during the period 1921 to 1927, Cuba's imports of eggs varied from 11 million dozen to nearly 17 million a year (Table 4). With a higher protective tariff, imports dropped to 6 million dozen in 1928, to 2½ million dozen in 1929, and with a further tariff boost in 1930, stopped entirely in 1932, except for very small imports of hatching eggs. This continued until the scarcity in 1945 and 1946 influenced the Government to waive the import duty on specified quantities.

Table 4.--Cuban imports of eggs  
in the shell, 1902-1945

Period	Quantity	Value	Imported from U.S.
	1,000 dozens	1,000 dozens	Percent
Average			
1902-05	1,095	220	a/
1906-10	4,178	848	a/
1911-15	5,045	1,192	a/
1916-20	8,767	3,398	a/
1921-25	12,678	3,660	99.9
1926-30	6,556	1,695	100.0
1931-35	12	2	100.0
1936-40	0.2	0.3	98.0
Annual			
1941	0.3	0.7	100.0
1942	0.5	0.5	68.8
1943	0.3	0.4	58.3
1944	0.4	0.6	100.0
1945	166.6	56.9	76.0
1946 (Est.)	2,000.0	-	-

a/ Data not available but almost entirely from  
United States.

The import duty on eggs that are indelibly marked showing the country of origin is 12 cents per dozen from the United States, and 15 to 30 cents from other countries; when the eggs are unmarked, the duty is 20 cents from the United States and 25 to 50 cents per dozen from other countries.

Cuba raised its import duties on eggs in 1927 as a part of the country's program for increasing domestic production and the degree of self-sufficiency. Prior to October 1927 eggs were dutiable at a rate equivalent to about 3.6 cents per dozen. In October 1927 the duty on United States eggs was raised to 8 cents a dozen if marked and 12 cents if unmarked. In May 1930 the duties were raised to 12 cents marked and 20 cents unmarked, and have since remained at this rate. <sup>1/</sup>

Imports of frozen eggs amounted to 21,000 pounds yearly just prior to the war, but were reduced during the war. Imports of powdered eggs have been sporadic and only in very small quantities; the maximum quantity during the past 20 years was 1,380 pounds in 1937.

<sup>1/</sup> Cuba and the United States accord each other many preferential rates under the Trade Agreement of 1939. No reduction in the Cuban tariff on eggs, however, was made in that agreement. The United States tariff on eggs is 5 cents a dozen established in the Canadian Trade Agreement of 1939 and is bound against increase during the life of that agreement.



Imports of live poultry and meat are shown in table 5. These have never been large. It is estimated that some 150,000 baby chicks were imported in 1945.

Table 5.--Imports of poultry, live and meat, 1925-45

Year	Quantity			
	Live		Meat	
	Breeding	Other	Chilled a/	Canned
	Number	Pounds	Pounds	Pounds
Average				
1925-29	2,107	6,259	91,094	b/ 8,800
1930-34	136	2,011	11,393	3,629
1935-39	73	9,054	2,798	1,664
Annual				
1940	23	12,716	5,545	2,703
1941	3	8,814	2,584	505
1942	0	2,557	139	2,467
1943	457	6,960	0	818
1944	22	8,854	240	2,621
1945	186	18,818	112	9,118

a/ Fresh, chilled or frozen. b/ Approximate.

Exports. Cuba exported very few fowl and no eggs prior to 1939 when 6,120 eggs were shipped to Panama and Puerto Rico. Subsequently, exports increased to 124,000 eggs in 1943, but none were exported in 1945 (Table 6). Nearly all of the exports since 1941 were to the United States Naval Station in Guantanamo, Cuba.

Table 6.--Exports of poultry and eggs, 1935-1945

Year	Live poultry a/		Eggs	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
	Number	Dollars	Dozens	Dollars
Average				
1935-39	799	2,680	102	27
Annual				
1940	2,180	5,857	572	84
1941	2,672	6,833	2,205	546
1942	1,133	3,380	6,467	2,450
1943	2,116	5,940	10,328	3,188
1944	458	1,873	9,002	2,606
1945	202	703	0	0

a/ All kinds of live poultry, including pigeons.

### Government Policy

The most important factor of Cuban Government policy with respect to the poultry industry is the protective tariff of 1927 and 1930 which stopped almost completely the importation of eggs until the temporary duty waiver during the emergency shortage in 1945 and 1946.

Other Government measures to aid the poultry industry consist of the importation by the Ministry of Agriculture of a small number of baby chicks for distribution to farmers and boys' and girls' club members, and the maintenance of an organization and facilities for an official egg-laying contest to establish records of production for individual growers and fanciers. Another wartime emergency measure, one calculated to protect the consumer rather than the poultry industry, was the ceiling price on eggs since 1943 at 60 cents a dozen, subsequently raised to 72 cents.

Although the Government protects Cuban poultrymen through the high import duties on eggs, it discourages production through an import duty on feed. The duty on mixed poultry feed from the United States is \$1.40 per 100 kilograms, plus surcharges and other taxes.

### Outlook

Cuban production is expected to increase slightly. The stimulation of high prices for both eggs and poultry during the past few years has encouraged poultrymen to establish several modern commercial poultry farms near Habana. These have been generally successful in spite of high feed prices, and have demonstrated that efficient poultry production is possible under Cuban conditions. Egg yields have been relatively high and mortality relatively low. The efficiency in terms of output per pound of feed, however, is expected to be lower under Cuban semi-tropical conditions than in cooler climates, as has been demonstrated to be the case with most livestock production.

Some further expansion of commercial production in Cuba is expected so long as prices remain relatively high as a result of prosperous conditions in the sugar industry during the next several years. A return to the prewar prices of 15 to 25 cents a dozen, however, would make commercial production impossible because commercial poultrymen, using relatively high-priced feed, cannot compete with the typical Cuban farm flocks that receive no feed or special care. The principal problem facing commercial production in Cuba is the high price of feed, a large part of which has to be imported. The limiting factor, therefore, is the price of eggs relative to the price of feed.

The market for imported eggs for eating will be limited to such quantities during the next year or so as the Cuban Government may permit through waiving of import duties in order to relieve temporary scarcities resulting from the more rapid expansion of demand than of production. Cuban bakers and other consumers are not accustomed or equipped to handle frozen eggs nor any appreciable volume of powdered eggs. Imports of hatchery eggs and baby chicks are expected to increase as interest in commercial production increases and some farmers also are encouraged by high prices.

